

RECEIVED
AIRWASHINGTON POST
2 December 1986

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's a Russian Word

William H. Schaap [letters, Nov. 20] appears obsessed with disproving the Soviet origins of the term *dezinformatsia*, though legions of Russian scholars and any literate émigré can attest otherwise. I doubt he can cite any reference in English that is not predated by a Soviet usage.

Dezinformatsia is indeed a made-up word, a word made up from a borrowed Latin root, a word brilliantly descriptive of the practice to which it is applied (and very narrowly applied), a term as emblematic of Big Brotherhood as George Orwell's "war is peace."

Mr. Schaap, as an amateur philologist, should be intrigued by another made-up Russian word: it is *amerikanetz*, and during the 1920s and '30s it meant a go-getter, a can-do jack-of-all-trades. It derived from the experiences of ordinary Russians with the liberal American trade unionists

who followed the chimera of the Communist workers' paradise to Russia and who worked side by side with the Russians to help build their industry, apply modern factory methods and instill the American work ethic. These Americans (Walter Reuther was one of them) left, disillusioned, but their example lingered on in the universal slang term *amerikanetz*. Josef Stalin's propaganda machine had to wage an all-out campaign, based on the mythic worker-hero Stakhanov, to erase the word from the oral language and replace it with *stakhanovite*.

Josef Stalin, according to some of his official biographies, was a philologist—a scholar of words and of the use of words. Like Mr. Schaap, he recognized the powerful political uses to which words can be put. I'm not sure whom Mr. Schaap is attacking with his *dezinformatsia* blunderbuss. But as a former journalist, a former editor of the CIA journal *Studies in Intelligence* and as a sometime liberal, I can assure him that *dezinformatsia* is indeed a Russian-invented word and that his own efforts to dis-inform readers about its origins need to be backed up with better scholarship than he has shown so far.

RICHARD D. KOVAR
Reston.